

NEWS

The Evergreen State College
Olympia, Washington 98505

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
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The National Science Foundation has awarded a \$114,500 grant to The Evergreen State College to implement "Essentia," a project aimed at providing students of all ages with instructional approaches that improve their self esteem and self image as they study content areas.

The grant is the second major NSF award to Evergreen this year. The college was awarded \$50,000 this spring to fund development of self-paced learning units as an approach to individualized learning in the natural and social sciences.

The Essentia project, originally entitled Environmental Studies for Urban Youth, began five years ago in Boulder, Colorado under sponsorship of the American Geological Institute.

"We quickly found from our test program that our approaches crossed traditional academic lines and involved not only sciences but the humanities and social sciences as well," explained Robert Samples, who has directed the project since its inception. A former science and education teacher in both public schools and colleges, Samples has worked with development of science curriculum since 1962.

He explains that the redirection of focus for Essentia meant the project had to seek new sponsorship. "Evergreen --- with its emphasis on interdisciplinary programs and individualized learning --- is the most compatible place in the nation for our project to be," he added.

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Dick Nichols, Director
Information Services

As a result, the entire project, including Samples and four other Essentia staff members, is now in the process of moving to the Evergreen campus. Samples will continue as director, with an Evergreen faculty member, biologist Robert Sluss, serving as liaison between the college, the project, and the National Science Foundation. Activities will be conducted in conjunction with a 15-member advisory council, which includes nine Evergreen faculty and educators from various institutions nationwide.

Conceived and created by classroom teachers, the project began in 1968 and has since been tested in 147 classrooms from kindergarten through graduate schools with more than 4,000 students across the country, including such major urban areas as New York City, Atlanta, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Los Angeles, Detroit and Chicago. In addition, nearly three quarters of a million students have used the materials since the program began.

The geographical focus for the 1973-74 academic year will be on three key areas: Puget Sound, Los Angeles Basin and San Francisco Bay but Essentia staff will continue to provide consultation to educators throughout the nation.

Samples describes the program's approach as "an invitation to decision making" which requires a very personalized kind of instruction.

"Usually, individualized instruction refers to students doing the same activity but at their own rate," he said. "Our personalized instruction means students doing activities they initiate at their own rate with teachers acting as research assistants and consultants during the inquiry."

At the core of the approach are materials that deal with what Samples calls "man's relationship to his natural and man-made surroundings, to the social, scientific, mathematical, artistic, psychological and literary aspects of that environment and to himself."

"All the materials are invitations to experience, to become aware of and to learn from one's immediate environment, which certainly includes one's self," he said.

The project has been enthusiastically received across the country, but Samples said more careful study lies ahead.

"We've tested the ways students respond to our approaches and the pressures that are exerted between teachers and students as a result," he explained. "This coming year we'll be working closely with Evergreen faculty and staff to create more materials that foster the idea of individual growth in the classroom and to study the stresses those materials create between adults, including teachers, administrators, parents and the community itself."

"We'll also be involving Evergreen students in as many ways as possible," Samples said. "We want to expose the program to college and university personnel as well as to in-service teachers so that as it develops, we can make improvements through creative feedback received from 'teachers' at all levels."

That feedback will begin this fall when special workshops will be held from teachers and administrators from the three key areas who will supplement their classroom activities with Essentia programs. Staff members will visit each of the project schools on a rotating basis and will conduct in-service sessions throughout the year.

Samples hopes to conclude the academic year with a followup workshop to review the activities and plan ways of expanding the program.